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Daniel Masters

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Framing Rebellious Choices:

The Case of the Palestinian National Movement

Daniel Masters

East Carolina University

One way to understand the rapid resurgence of violence for the Palestinian National Movement is by turning to a prospect theory model of decision-making. Prospect theory explains that people make decisions based on their view of the alternatives in terms of gains or losses. Individuals tend to favor risky behavior when facing choices over losses, and risk averse behavior when facing choices over gains. This suggests that barriers to rebellious collective action are not high because the certainty of a positive payoff is not necessary to induce people to participate. I explore this explanation by drawing upon evidence gathered through interviews with supporters of Palestinian rebellions. The evidence provides some insight into the recent violence in the Occupied Territories by probing issues relating to framing of rebellious decisions.

The recent uprising, or al-Aqsa Intifada, in the West Bank and Gaza is a reminder of the collective action problem and rebellion. More specifically, why would Palestinians, who had previously demobilized from the Jabalya Intifada (1987-1993) in favor of the Oslo Accords, remobilize for a new intifada that is much more violent than in the past? What can account for the willingness of Palestinians to take actions that would directly affect their individual security with no foreseeable payoff? The current debate regarding collective mobilization tends to revolve around rational choice perspectives defined, in part, by Resource Mobilization, as well as social psychological perspectives defined here by Framing Theory. Both perspec-

tives provide insight into the factors that move an otherwise quiescent population towards high-risk collective action. As separate explanations, however, they are incomplete and speak past each other. Furthermore, the way the individual is currently cast by the rational choice perspective, and generally accepted by sociological framing, will ultimately block any effort to provide a satisfactory combination of the two. This suggests that a new model of the individual may be useful for explaining the role of the individual, organization, and social conditions as they relate to mobilizing people for collective political violence.

Prospect theory may provide a new model. Prospect theory is a contextually based model of decision-making that explains when individuals are more or less likely to accept risk. Prospect theory explains that people's decisions are shaped by their tendency to view alternatives in terms of gains or losses. Individuals tend towards risky behavior when facing choices over losses, and risk adverse behavior when facing choices over gains. However, individual risk acceptance is not shaped strictly by the quality of conditions. Rather, one's subjective assessment on the probability of failure for risky options is offset by a similarly subjective assessment that risky alternatives can negate perceived losses (Berejikian 1992, 654). More specifically, the barriers to rebellious collective action are not insurmountable because the *certainty* of a positive payoff is not necessary for participation (Berejikian 1992, 654).

I review the current debate between the rational choice and social psychology perspectives with the intent to demonstrate their existing strengths and weaknesses. Prospect theory is then presented as an alternative model of individuals' likelihood of accepting risk and an explanation for the relationship between individual actors, social conditions, and social movement organizations. The remainder of the paper explores the Palestinian National Movement as an illustrative case using prospect theory as

its orienting lens. The case study includes a review of history combined with interview data gathered from supporters of violent action within the Palestinian National Movement.

THE THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE

When studying social movements, one problem we invariably face is explaining the mobilization of latent groups towards collective action. The problem is in attempting to explain two separate phases of mobilization: (a) conditions that create the potential for collective action, and (b) transferring the potential for action into realized states of action. Overall mobilization theories have trouble trying to explain both ends of this process.

For example, Framing Theory attempts to define social movements as the outcome of reality construction and communication processes (Benford 1997, 409). The term "frame" refers to an interpretative schemata that simplifies and condenses the world by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action within one's present or past environment (Snow and Benford 1992, 137). The frame is a necessary condition for movement participation that works through efforts to link individuals (potential participants) and social movement organizations (mobilizing agents) by providing a set of individual level beliefs, values and interests that are "congruent and complimentary" with the goals and ideology of the organization (Snow *et al.* 1986, 464). Once the frame is constructed, the organization engages in micromobilization (activities to advertise, promote, and diffuse the defined frame into society or a target group). Collective action results from a particular frame that accents or exaggerates problems within the social condition and defines those conditions as deserving a collective response (Snow and Benford 1992, 137). As such, the collective action frame serves as a "mode of attribution" that will motivate people to take action (Snow and Benford 1992, 137).

It stands to reason then that in order for the frame to gain currency among potential participants there must be a set of underlying social conditions that approximate the framed conditions. Therefore, at the heart of Framing Theory is an assumption that social conditions matter to the mobilization process. Social conditions are the source of grievances that are defined and articulated by the frame. The grievance can, and will, be subjectively interpreted to reflect the socio-political actor's perception of reality, and the goals defined by the collective action solution will reflect the actor's interpretation of how reality should look. In other words, through framing we define the current world and seek to affect a different interpretation of reality (Benford 1997, 410).

"How we move from poor social conditions to collective action?" remains an unanswered question. Framing Theory does explain the various means by which perceptions of reality are defined, and how those perceptions can be couched to define a need for collective action. What, however, is the primary catalyst that converts a potential for action to the realization of action? Framing Theory does not attempt to answer this question directly. Instead, it explains the surrounding conditions, how they are (or should be) perceived, leading to the assumption that if the frame is accepted that it will create an emotional response among the target group that makes action possible. As such, Framing Theory is given credit for reintroducing ideas to social movement studies (Oliver and Johnston 2000, 37). The exact importance of this contribution, however, is disputed.

Resource Mobilization is a form of collective action theory informed through Mancur Olson's (1965) Collective Action Model. At the heart of Collective Action is the assumption of actors defined by rational behavior (della Porta and Diani 1999, 7) or Subjective Expected Utility. This assumption provides a model of the individual as a rational egoist that places a premium

on self-interest over the interests of the group. Because the actor tends to calculate costs and benefits of action based on self-interest, with the intent of maximizing benefits, the tendency to "free ride" on the efforts of others is strong. As such, the primary goal of any group is to solve the free-rider problem. Olson (1965) defined a set of solutions that involve providing exclusive benefits to movement participants.

Resource mobilization adds to this discussion by elucidating specific tasks that social movement organizations engage in to affect action. The core argument is that high-risk collective action requires resources (Khawaja 1995, 151; Loveman 1998, 484). Organization is central as it provides a basic connection between people enabling the advancement of their goals. By connecting people through organization, they are better positioned to pool and direct resources towards collective action (Lovemen 1998, 484). Collective action enables aggrieved people to advance their goals. Conversely, aggrieved but unorganized people are less likely to be able to advance their own goals (Khawaja 1995, 151). The opportunity to engage in collective action is thus a function of available resources and organizational strength (Khawaja 1995, 152).

The ability to gather and direct resources is certainly essential to any type of collective action. Resource Mobilization, though, explains the need for resources more specifically as a function of rational actors. That is to say, people behave in a rational way by following their interests. To engage in collective action, however, requires the pursuit of interests through the calculation of costs and benefits as shaped by resource availability and constraints on the ability to act (della Porta and Diani 1999, 7-8; McAdams, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, 21). In short, mobilization for high-risk collective action is a function of resources that reduce the costs of action and enable the group to share incentives among participants (della Porta and Diani 1999, 8).

When dissecting the Resource Mobilization position, it should be noted that Resource Mobilization speaks to two specific types of incentives to explain collective action. The first is what Mark Lichbach (1995, 48) refers to as a market solution to free riding, specifically increasing resources. One of the largest barriers to engaging in collective action is the ability of people to take action. The ability to act is determined by available resources. Potential rebels cannot act without equipment, or the means to obtain equipment. Thus, a person or group of people, without the means to engage in rebellion will be unable to do so. Through organization, the group can pool and distribute resources among members in order to bring about action. In this way, the barrier to action (cost of participation) is reduced through the organization directing resources in such a way as to provide the equipment necessary, meaning that potential participants do not need to pay for their equipment out of pocket. The second type of incentive is a hierarchy solution to free riding, providing selective incentives (Lichbach 1995, 215). Since the benefit of rebellious action tends to be shared by all members of the target community equally, people will assess participation in terms of personal costs that yield limited personal payoffs. As such, additional incentives are needed to motivate people to participate. As Lichbach states, a dissident's self-interest prevents collective action and works against the rise of dissident movements unless an exclusive benefit is offered to offset the personal costs of participation (1995, 216).

Viewing the market and hierarchy solutions as one theory provides a clear and elegant explanation. However, if we disentangle the hierarchy and market solution, Resource Mobilization runs into trouble. The trouble relates more directly to selective incentives than to increased resources. A solution to the collective action problem based on the need to supply exclusive benefits to participants in order to enlist their support suggests that

one's narrowly defined self-interest will usually overwhelm the decision to accept risk. Moreover, the need for a positive payoff is necessary to mobilize potential participants. As stated above, this solution relies heavily on the assumptions of Subjective Expected Utility. Assumptions of particular interest are intransitivity (individual preferences are consistent across all contexts) and benefit maximization (the preference selected is chosen in order to maximize one's utility). The problem with these assumptions is that they are normative axioms that when tested in experimental settings are routinely violated. Being normative, Subjective Expected Utility axioms fail to explain accurately decision-making behavior, and thus fail to hold any reliable predictive utility (McDermott 1998, 8). Concomitant to this, by accepting intransitivity and benefit maximization, we are forced to accept the conclusion that social conditions and efforts at framing are unnecessary, as context does not matter to an individual's decision to accept risk. Context may identify the need for action, but it does not matter to the mobilization effort. The question is "if context does not matter to risk acceptance, why do organizations engage in framing exercises?"

Prospect Theory

Prospect theory offers several advantages over the rational actor model. First, it provides an empirically based model of decision-making that defines the process as one where people are motivated more to avoid losses than to maximize benefits (McDermott 1998, 7). Furthermore, the decision mechanics are understood as a process where evaluation of alternatives is influenced by how options are framed. This means the decision process falls prey to judgemental biases, and these biases can be manipulated by outside forces such as advisors, groups, etc. (McDermott 1998, 7-8). While the individual remains a self-interested actor, the agent makes decisions within a dynamic

environment that constantly shapes and reshapes perceptions of alternatives. Though context shapes how individuals view options, the process is not overly complex. In fact, predictions of risk propensity are possible once we know the domain in which a decision is viewed. That is to say, if people view a decision as defined by a choice between gains, they are risk averse; if the decision is defined by a choice between losses, people are risk acceptant (Berejikian 1992; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Levy 1992; McDermott 1998).

Prospect theory explains the behavioral tendencies described above as related to three observations regarding decision processes. First, people are more sensitive to changes in position rather than in their overall position. However, the impact of the change diminishes as it grows large (Levy 2000, 194), commonly referred to as diminishing sensitivity to increasing gains and losses. It suggests two things: (a) people define their condition on the basis of a reference point, which is the anchor for any decision; (b) as conditions change, people make judgements on the value of change based on the reference point. As we move further away from the reference point, the value of the change losses its impact.¹

The reference point for decisions is important because it defines our interpretation of change, whereby the individual will assign a value to change as either a gain or a loss. Once a change is defined as gains or losses we observe that people will respond differently to options. People overvalue losses relative to gains of equal value (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 279; Levy 2000,

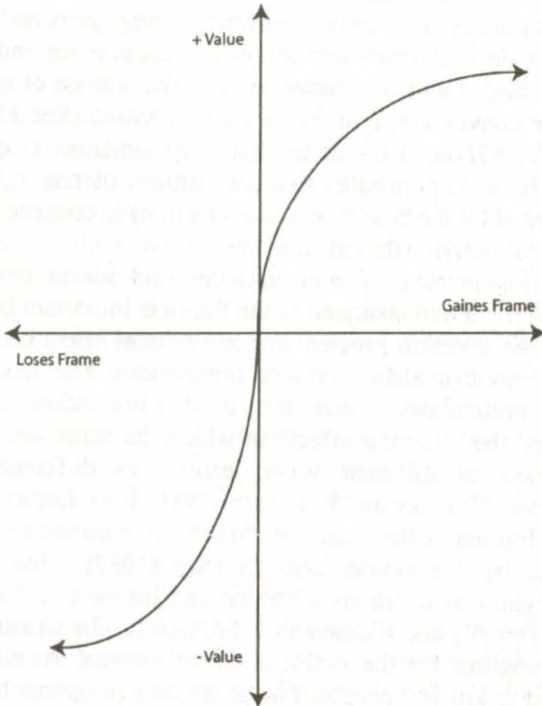
¹ A common example used to demonstrate diminishing sensitivity is to consider the value of a \$100 gain. The gain of \$100 typically means more if it takes a person from \$0 to \$100 than if it takes them from \$1,100 to \$1,200. The increment of the change is the same, but its perceived value is different as the total asset position changes. The same holds for losses where the perceived value of loss decreases as the value of the loss increases (unless the larger loss is intolerable).

194; Quattrone and Tversky 1988, 721). The evaluation of losses prompts a second observation regarding decisions: *loss aversion*, or the tendency among individuals to avoid risk when making choices between gains and risk acceptant when making choices between losses (Levy 2000, 195).

The tendency to avoid losses when facing gains and to seek risk when facing losses implies value function for individuals that is S-shaped with a concave curve in the domain of gains and a *steeper* convex curve in the domain of losses (See Figure 1). Jack Levy (2000, 195) notes that experiments on decision-making have demonstrated that this pattern of risk orientation (represented by the S-shaped value function) is consistent across a variety of individuals and situations.

The assymetry of perceived gains and losses around the reference point demonstrated in the figure is important because it informs the decision process and one critical effect on choices: the systematic tendency reverse preferences. The tendency to reverse preferences raises the third observation regarding decisions: the "framing effect" in which the same decision can be framed in different ways leading to different chosen alternatives (Tversky and Kahneman 1981, 164). Demonstrations of the framing effect can be found in numerous examples provided by Kahneman and Tversky (1982). One example defines gains as a "survival" frame and losses as a "mortality" frame (Tversky and Kahneman 1986, S260). The situation is the U.S. preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs have been proposed to fight the disease. The estimates of the consequences for each program are as follows:

Figure 1: Prospect Theory Value Function



Source: Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979). "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision-Making under Risk." *Econometrica* 47(2): 279.

Survival Frame:

- Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved.
- Program B is adopted, there is a $1/3$ chance that 600 people will be saved, and a $2/3$ chance that no people will be saved.

Now consider the same exact situation but framed differently:

Mortality Frame:

- Program C is adopted, 400 people will die.
- Program D is adopted, there is a $1/3$ chance that no one will die, and a $2/3$ chance that 600 people will die.

In the survival frame, 72% ($n = 152$) of the subjects preferred choice "A" suggesting risk-averse tendencies. Cognitively individuals are drawn to the possibility to save 200 people with certainty over the gamble which could potentially save more people, but with a probability that none will live. In the mortality frame, 78% ($n = 155$) of the subjects preferred choice "D" indicating risk acceptant tendencies. In this presentation, participants move away from choice "C" even though it is the same choice as "A." The difference lies in the way alternatives are framed—option "C" highlights 400 people who will die with certainty.

Framing effects are related to the way options are presented, combined with norms, habits, and expectancies (Tversky and Kahneman 1986). The norms and habits that affect decisions tend to be very idiosyncratic, but explainable through the editing and evaluation phases of the decision-making process. First, when presented with a decision, individuals engage processes to simplify the task by coding, combining, and canceling alternatives, which narrows the number of options and defines those

options as gains or losses.² Second, once provided with a reasonable presentation of the decision (provided through our own internal editing or by outside actors) people tend to accept that formulation and generally will not attempt to recast the decision. This is important because it suggests that a person's view of a decision can be manipulated by the way the decision alternatives are cast. Third, people abstract the decision from other related factors to focus only on those outcomes that seem most relevant to the immediate problem while ignoring other related outcomes.³ Fourth, people attach value to change and specifically seek to avoid losses—meaning that we assess decision outcomes based on an anchor or reference point and the *potential* for change to or from the reference point.⁴

All of this matters in the decision-making task in that people are highly sensitive to changes in their environment or aspirations on how that environment should look, and this sensitivity can greatly alter our ordering of preferences when making a decision. As the ordering of preferences change, we note the alternatives people choose reflect more extreme responses to losses than to gains. As a result, preferences and the tendency towards

² All these processes take place during the editing phase of a decision. Editing facilitates decision-making by highlighting certain options while discarding others. (For more information refer to McDermott 1998, or Kahneman and Tversky 1979). In the editing phase we observe that people engage in: *Coding* (sorting outcomes and defining them as gains or losses), *combination* (winnowing down prospects), and *cancellation* (throwing out extremely unlikely options).

³ This refers to *segregation*, which can be important in that people may view a decision to rebel as related more exclusively to the outcome of independence for the national group, but ignore the related factors that it could result in death or imprisonment. In other words, they focus only on the specific outcome a decision is supposed to bring about, while ignoring all other possible outcomes.

⁴ This refers to the evaluation phase where the framed prospects are assessed and the prospect with the highest value is chosen (Tversky and Kahneman 1986, 255). The prospect that holds the highest value is the one that can produce the greatest amount of change, with the value of change being shaped by loss adverse tendencies.

risk are not invariant across contexts. In behavioral terms, the assumptions of rational collective action are contradicted where narrow self-interest—defined by the effort to maximize benefits—is consistent across all contexts. As such, the barriers to collective action remain high in all situations requiring groups to provide inducements in order to mobilize participants. By using prospect theory, we can now say that as context changes, the tendency among people to accept risk changes, which lowers the barrier to collective action within situations defined by losses. Risky options become acceptable because they offer the possibility to escape certain losses *not* because of the perceived likelihood of success associated with the option, or the provision of some other positive payoff.

There are some final points to make regarding prospect theory that are pertinent to social movements. First, evidence demonstrates that groups tend to escalate risky commitments more so than individuals (Kameda and Davis 1990; Whyte 1993). Whyte (1993, 435) and Levi and Whyte (1997, 796) suggest that when people are gathered into groups polarization processes dominate where majority positions favoring risk are magnified through discussions that expose all members to arguments favoring that position. Polarization, combined with a tendency to be perceived in a favorable light, creates a convergence condition where members of the group reflect the majority position (Whyte 1993, 435). However, convergence and polarization are separate processes and one does not require the other in order for risk escalation to occur (Levi and Whyte 1997, 802; Whyte 1993, 435). Some segments of the group may remain opposed to risk escalation, but simply abide by the decision of the group to avoid unnecessary confrontation (Levi and Whyte 1997, 802). An effort to avoid confrontation within the group does not suggest that all members will accept risks equally. Some will support risky efforts but choose not to participate; others will oppose

risk altogether. These choices are explained in part by observed inaction biases where people may judge action as worse than inaction (Baron and Riet 1994, 477; Schweitzer 1994, 459). The inaction bias can manifest itself in the form of a perceived "tradeoff" where individuals assess forms of action as well as social conditions. As such, certain acts (rebellion) may be perceived of as a loss relative to a default position (inaction) meaning that some people will prefer the default position of inaction (Baron and Riet 1994, 479).

Prospect Theory and Rebellious Choices

Prospect theory provides some interesting implications for rebellious choices. For instance, prospect theory would predict that if the status quo (subjectively perceived conditions) approximates (meets or exceeds) the reference point, people are in a gains frame. In a gains frame, individuals will not take the chance on a rebellion that may improve conditions since there is also a chance that conditions will get worse (sure gains over risky gains). Conversely, "if the reference point is not congruent with the status quo...[it] is destabilizing and reinforces movement away from the status quo." (Levy 1997, 91). When reference points are not congruent with the status quo, people perceive the status quo in terms of losses. Hence individuals are more likely to accept rebellion even though there is a high chance of failure.

The following illustration is useful here. In Palestine, groups such as Fateh, the Popular Front, Democratic Front, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas openly call for the creation of an independent Palestine. Independent means Palestinian lands liberated from Israeli control (the defined boundaries of the "liberated Palestine" vary by group). The goal departs from the status quo (limited autonomy in Gaza and on 40% of the West Bank) granted during the peace process. The status quo conditions fall behind

the reference point defined by these groups—hence, a losses frame. The decision facing Palestinians then looks like this: first, accept the current conditions of limited autonomy on narrowly defined territory. Second, rebel with a likelihood that no change will occur but a chance that more land will be transferred and greater independence could be achieved. Prospect theory predicts that when this condition exists, risky options become more attractive.

The Palestinian example demonstrates the ways in which prospect theory can be used to understand rebellious choices in general. To grasp the nuances of how individual and group framing takes place requires fuller elaboration. Elaboration makes it apparent that prospect theory allows us to recast our understanding of (rebellious) collective action while providing a conceptual bridge between Framing Theory and Resource Mobilization.

To begin, I assume individual behavior is governed by prospect theory. As such, actors are motivated to avoid losses and accept greater amounts of risk in order to avoid losses. To explain the rise of social movements (rebellion in particular) requires that a perception of loss exists based upon some identifiable reference point. The perception of loss can be manufactured or manipulated by groups, but in order to gain any currency, the presented frame for the rebellious choice must be (in some way) consistent with conditions perceived by group members. Thus, the task is to explain how such perceptions would emerge within individuals, transfer to groups, and what role the organization will play in framing prospects and mobilizing people for rebellion.

The existence of perceived losses among members of the nationalist community begins at the individual level. Individual perceptions derive from one's experience with conflict, socialization, and the impact of historical incidents. *Experience with conflict* refers to the degree to which individuals are directly affected

by the conditions associated with some form of personal or group subjugation. Conditions like concentrated poverty, housing discrimination, and suppression through arbitrary arrest bring awareness to individuals that they are in conflict with another group. Awareness of the conflict further suggests that current conditions represent a loss when compared to an idealized no-conflict condition. *Socialization* refers to the role of families in influencing people's perception of losses. Families that have a history of support for rebel activity are more likely to teach children lessons that highlight perceived losses and support for rebellious activity. Finally, *historical events*, such as massacres, have the tendency to mobilize large numbers of people into action. These events temporarily intensify the losses frame, thereby increasing the number of people willing to accept risk.

When the experiences and perceptions discussed above are concentrated among individuals that share common links to a solidary group it is likely to generate group perceptions. Specialized groups occur when individuals perceive themselves to be members of an imagined community leading to the social construction of "we" and to the emergence of group interests (Hall 1993, 50-51; Tilly 1978b, 63). Threats to group interests will then provoke group responses, not individual responses. This is particularly relevant when the basis of the solidary group is national or ethnic identity. Such cultural identities create stronger, more enduring, linkages between individuals (Gurr 1996, 63; Tilly 1978b, 63). Cultural groups that experience shared grievances are likely to galvanize, making mobilization easier (Gurr 1996, 63). Thus, when a solidary group exists, the potential for organized group response to perceived losses increases (Tilly 1978b, 64). However, increased potential does not mean that rebellious choices will necessarily be defined or acted upon. In essence, the potential for organized group action is greater, but not certain. More specifically, when losses are concentrated

among members of the solidary group, we see the emergence of a "constituent community" that entrepreneurs can draw upon to organize for collective action.

Experience, perceptions of poor conditions, and group cohesion are necessary but not sufficient to provoke a rebellious action. These factors do not provide unity or direction to the dissatisfied masses. Thus, the perceptions of loss remain "un-framed" in terms of rebellious choices. To move from dissatisfied masses to collective action requires *organization*. This is where Framing Theory and Resource Mobilization contribute to our understanding of the mobilization process. Framing Theory informs us about the tasks organizations undertake in order to construct a worldview among individuals. The worldview will (a) frame the individual level experiences within the context of group experiences, which are related to the social condition (i.e. assign responsibility for individual level experiences); and (b) frame the decision for individuals as one where people can accept the current conditions (defined as a sure loss) or engage in some form of collective action to escape those losses (gamble for improved conditions).⁵ The organizational framing of conditions (i.e. micromobilization effort) is then used to define a course of action needed to reconstruct a reality coherent with the ideology or goals of the organization. Resource Mobilization adds to this

⁵ It is necessary to understand that presenting the choice as between sure losses and a gamble for improvement implies that the risk associated with the gamble could result in a worsening of social conditions. In the intermediate phases of any collective action (particularly rebellion), social conditions will worsen before they improve. As such, we should consider degrading social conditions within the context of prospect theory whereby the decision to take action is segregated from other relevant outcomes. Consequently, degrading social conditions are not likely to act as a barrier to future action. Instead, they are likely to be integrated in to the existing losses frame. As such, Israeli military actions to the Intifada are not likely to be viewed as a response so much. Rather, Palestinians are likely to view the actions as a continuation of losses—a continuation of present conditions.

rected to the identification of important points that shape goals and aspirations of Palestinian political groups currently active in the national movement. Second is a review of interview data gathered from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The data are used to identify individual level reference points, the frame for a decision to support rebellious activity, and the framing effect (i.e., isolating the biases within the decision process) that led people to support rebellion in the past. The data were collected in the summer of 1999 prior to the onset of the recent violence. The data provides insights on past rebellious activity. At the same time, the interviews were finished thirteen months prior to the onset of the current wave of violence. As such, the data provide some useful insights to the recent violence. However, given the amount of time that passed between the interviews and the violence, we cannot rely on the data as a predictor for that violence; rather it is insightful, not deterministic.

There were 39 respondents⁶ selected through a non-probability design referred to as a convenience sample using a "snowballing" technique. A snowball technique relies on whatever sampling units (in this case individuals) are conveniently available (Nachmias and Nachmias 1992, 175), expanding from those units to others based on referrals made to the researcher. The sampling technique is a compromise made to accommodate the need for trust between the researcher and respondents, and reflects a certain reality that it is impossible to gather a random sample of people that support or engage in rebellious activity. As

⁶ The sample includes 34 males and 5 females, 37 people with or receiving a college education and 2 without a college education, 21 people that hold professional level jobs and 18 with manual labor jobs, 36 people proclaiming affiliation with the dominant religious group (Islam) and 3 proclaiming affiliation with the non-dominant religious group (Christian). Finally, 28 respondents identify with the dominant national group (Palestinian-Arab), while 11 proclaim affiliation with a non-dominant national group (Arab, or Arab-Palestinian).

by explaining the specific tasks organizations engage in to mobilize people to take action. The organization provides a communicative framework that metes out the frame for a rebellious decision and presents that decision to the individuals in the community. Furthermore, by drawing individuals into the organization resources are gathered (labor, money, and other material resources), which are then directed towards the collective action effort. The key point to remember with prospect theory is that people are already predisposed to accept risk; therefore, the group will need to expend little if any resources to induce people to take action. Rather resources are directed more specifically to enable action.

In sum, a prospect theory model of (rebellious) collective action provides an explanation whereby rebellious decisions are molded by social conditions. The ability to mobilize remains limited unless an organization can inspire people within the target community to rebel. To do this the rebel group must engage in the process of framing, as described by Framing Theory, with the intent of presenting the decision to rebel as a choice between two losses: one certain, the other probable. In conjunction with framing rebellious choices the rebel group enables collective action by providing a communicative framework, gathering resources, and directing the resources towards collective action.

APPLYING PROSPECT THEORY: THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Prospect theory explains that risk propensity is related to individuals' perceptions of alternatives as shaped by their context. Application of prospect theory is cumbersome, since it requires a description of conditions and how those conditions relate to decisions about collective action. To apply prospect theory to the Palestinian National Movement, I have turned to two sources of information. First is a brief review of the historical conflict, di-

such, the data do not allow for generalizations to the broader population or other cases. Instead, the data are used to deepen the context of the case study to demonstrate the framing effect and how the framing effect relates to rebellious choices.⁷ Interviewees identify themselves as supporters of various political groups in the National Movement that have supported the use of violence in the past (e.g. Fateh, Hamas, DFLP, PFLP, Islamic Jihad). Interviewees defined themselves as: (a) activists, involved in military operations ($n = 21$); (b) active supporters providing logistical support to military operations ($n = 10$); or (c) passive supporters ($n = 8$), offering passive resistance to Israeli Occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.⁸

Historical Background

Four points in history are necessary to understand the context for the PNM and the current Al-Aqsa Intifada. First is the World War I settlement where the decision by Britain and France to divide Arab lands into a series of Mandates, combined with Britain's decision to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine, forged a Palestinian identity as separate from other Arabs by way of the new boundary and as a group in conflict with European

⁷ In the interest of full disclosure of the interview process, readers should be aware of the possible points of unintended bias. These unintended biases relate to specific issues of data collection through face-to-face interviews and could have implications for validity. The validity issues are of less importance here simply because the data are not being presented as a hypothesis test, rather as an illustrative case. Nonetheless, they must be included. The interviews lasted (on average) two hours. All interviews were taped, with the exception of one where the interviewee did not feel comfortable with taping; handwritten notes were used, instead. All interviews were conducted in private in a setting determined by the interviewee. The only exceptions were in cases where translators were needed. The interviewee provided the translator when needed.

⁸ Variations in level of support are ascertained in relation to other elements in a broader study on rebellious choices. While there is potentially interesting information related to how people in different levels of support varied in their perceptions of gains and losses, the nuances of the differences are not within the scope of the present study.

immigrants. The second point is the 1948 War, which created Israel; meanwhile Palestine effectively disappeared as the land was divided between Israel, Egypt, and Jordan. The creation of Israel and the disappearance of Palestine shaped the dominant goal of the early Palestinian National Movement: "The Return" to reclaim all of historical Palestine. The 1967 and 1973 Wars must be understood as a whole in terms of the impact on the conflict. The "Six Day War" of 1967 placed Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the direct military occupation of the Israeli Defense Forces. As a result, Palestinians began to perceive their situation as defined by displacement and military occupation. The 1973 War is a point where some Palestinian groups redefined their goals. Specifically, Fateh and the DFLP articulated and circulated a two state solution—Israel within its pre-1967 boundaries, and Palestine on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The two-state solution drove a wedge into the Palestinian National Movement with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine creating the "Rejectionist Front" to oppose the two-state solution to focus on the goals of "The Return."

The third and fourth points were the Jabalya Intifada (1987-93) and the Oslo Peace Process, respectively. They introduced a number of important factors. First, the uprising signaled a wholesale rejection of occupation. All segments of Palestinian society were mobilized for this uprising, indicating a problem for Israel in its efforts towards "benign occupation." Second, extremist Muslim groups emerged as important actors. Islamic Jihad and Hamas surfaced prior to, and during, the intifada to assume an active military role for Muslim groups. These groups identified an alternative path to national liberation through the reclamation of Palestinian lands and rule under Islamic law. The Islamic groups further divided the Palestinian people by supporting "The Return" goal (rejecting the two-state solution) and sup-

porting the formation of a religious state (rejecting the secularist position of Fateh, DFLP, and the PFLP).

The Oslo Peace Process, both as an event and process, is important for setting in motion Israel's effort to press forward with the two-state solution. The Israeli version of two states gives Palestinians limited home rule in restricted areas and cities to establish a government structure and system of administration as intermediate steps to full statehood. The creation of two states would take place through negotiations to resolve (primarily) boundary issues. In effect, Oslo lends strength to groups that changed their goals to support two states. At the same time, Oslo can be perceived as an attempt to pitch Palestinians into a gains frame, thereby provoking risk adverse behavior, which would undermine support for the activities of Islamic groups.

The historical information provides us a few important pieces of information: it defines the group targeted for collective mobilization, the universe of goals for many of the mobilized groups in the Palestinian National Movement, and the place of the Oslo Peace Process as an effort to pitch Palestinians into a gains frame making people more likely to reject risk (i.e., end the Intifada and the increasing violence by Islamic groups). The interview data provided below is designed to demonstrate how this information is reflected among those interviewed in order to explain how decisions to rebel (in the past) were framed. At the same time, it offers a chance to understand why the current intifada erupted.

A. REFERENCE POINT ESTIMATION AND FRAME OF REFERENCE

To define a reference point interviewees were asked, "Could you define the goals of the group you support?" From this question, evidence demonstrates there are many different groups, none of which is completely dominant. The absence of dominant

ing views indicates that there are many different reference points. Despite this, all groups focused their primary attacks against Israel, indicating the possible existence of a core reference point modified by the specific goals of the different groups. In fact, all respondents spoke of a single issue that could serve as the reference point of Palestinians—a liberated Palestine. Beyond the issue of national liberation, respondents provided details relating to visions of a liberated Palestine. The following comments provide examples of the differing perspectives:

“Fateh is not an ideological party or movement. This group is not related to religion or ideology. It is a movement for national liberation, to bring back our identity. National liberation is the first and only goal right now.” (03)

“[For the DFLP] the main goal is the freedom of Palestine. But we also have future goals about how we should live and solve problems...we see one country in all of Palestine, one country-one people, Jewish or otherwise.” (05)

“[For the Islamic Groups] one of the main goals is to worship one god. Palestine has a special condition; the Israelis occupy us. If we are to worship one God, we need peace. So we seek to bring back the land to the Palestinian people under our religion. This land is only for the people that believe in God.” (08)

The primary goal of liberation is consistent for all respondents from all groups, even for those individuals who do not pledge support for any specific group (preferring to support the Palestinian National Movement as a whole).

Using the stated goals as an indicator of a reference point, individuals were asked to assess the past conditions (prior to Oslo) in relation to their goals. All respondents stated that past condi-

tions fell short of their goals (i.e., the reference point). Therefore, individuals perceive previous conditions as incongruent with the reference point, thus indicating a perception of losses.

To assess perceptions relating to the 1999 conditions (post Oslo), interviewees were asked, "Do you feel the Oslo Accords brought your group closer to realizing its goals?" The responses to this question indicate that perceived losses among individuals did not diminish in the face of the peace process. The majority of respondents provide comments similar to the following:

"Oslo actually sacrificed part of historical Palestine. It legitimized Israeli supremacy and terrorism over the occupied lands. Oslo also aimed to legitimize the historical claims of Zionism by distinguishing the reality of Israel, while also promoting the view that Arabs were not equal to the Jews." (01)

"It is the minimum for our ambition. It frees about 1 million people. But there are still 3 million in the West Bank, one million inside the green line, 6 million in the diaspora. This is the main problem. Most of our people are still in the diaspora. Until we find a solution to this we are not finished." (04)

"Our objective has not been achieved. It will take time and we will have to be very careful. But as far as Oslo is concerned, it does not bring me closer to my goals. It has taken me further away." (21)

"Its relation to the struggle is minimal. How could Israel end the Intifada? By tying the PLO away from its political coalition and making it responsible to Israel for Israeli security. They do this through Oslo." (29)

Among the 39 respondents, only seven believe the Oslo Process is a step in the right direction. These respondents, however,

acknowledge that Oslo's advantage is that it puts an end to violence, not to the conflict. The following comments best demonstrate this point:

"It has created changes in the political conditions. In the beginning it was the armed struggle and now it is not. For me the armed struggle is not the way now. We should try the peace process to achieve our goals." (07)

"Oslo is a beginning. We have reached this point to end the fighting. We are moving into a new phase. There was a need to put an end to the armed conflict on the ground. This kind of conflict could not achieve its goals. A conflict between two 'states' will be easier to conduct." (03)

In sum, individuals identify a reference point that is incongruent with their perceptions of the status quo conditions—hence a losses frame. The perceptions of loss remain strong among the majority of respondents (82.1%) notwithstanding the ongoing peace process. The few respondents (17.9%) that acknowledge change stemming from the peace processes suggest that change has taken the form of altering the conduct of the conflict, not resolving the issues of the conflict. Consequently, when asked, "Are you less likely to support armed resistance today given the signing of the Oslo Accords?" the majority of the respondents (92.3%) indicate that they will continue to support armed struggle if a new round of violence erupts. Only three respondents state they would not support a continuation of violence. Among those indicating continued support, most made arguments that were consistent with the following comment:

"[Israel] says the Palestinians now have their state and do not need to fight Israel. What they mean is that we should be happy. Barak is saying that this

Authority is the Palestinian State. But we are still under the control of Israel. We have not gotten much. They still do not compensate us for the past, and we cannot ask for it because we are not independent...if we are to stick to this situation it will become a big problem for the Palestinians." (05)

B. THE FRAMING EFFECT

The responses demonstrate that a losses frame was present among those interviewed. The perception of a losses frame appears to hold (judging from the accounts of those interviewed) before Oslo, and has not changed since Oslo. The next task is to determine a framing bias that may have an impact on the decision to support armed struggle. To isolate the framing effect requires that we first establish whether people believed losses were certain or transitory. Prospect theory suggests that when people believe the losses they face are certain, then risky options become acceptable because they offer the possibility to escape losses altogether.

To determine if the respondents believe losses to be certain, individuals were asked: "If you did not support the armed struggle, in your opinion would conditions improve, remain the same, or get worse?" In response, all interviewees suggested they were convinced conditions would have stayed the same. Given that all respondents believe social conditions represent a loss, this finding suggests they believe that past losses were certain. A few respondents indicated that in light of the entire struggle, conditions would not change, but on a personal level they felt conditions would be worse. None believed conditions would improve. Thus, certainty of existing losses is present among interviewees.

Does perception of certain losses translate into a perception that rebellion could recover the losses? To answer the question, I draw upon three pieces of evidence: two from the interview data

and one from an empirical generalization on rebellious strategies. First, individuals were asked: "Did you believe the armed struggle would lead to the creation of an independent Palestine?" Of the 39 respondents 25 (64.1%) gave a firm "yes" to this question. Nine respondents (23%) give a qualified "yes," stating the armed struggle was not *the entire* strategy, but was one tactic used within a larger political movement. Five (12.8%) indicate they did not believe the armed struggle would succeed.

A belief in the possibility that a risky option can negate losses is suggestive of a framing effect, but it does not provide a firm demonstration of framing biases. The second piece of evidence is that historically, rebellion is unsuccessful. Most cases of rebellion relying upon paramilitary tactics (as the Palestinian case does) fail within the first eighteen months (Gurr 1988, 35). The few that survive rarely succeed in bringing about change. By extrapolating from what is known about the likelihood for rebel success, and using this as a base line for assessing the likelihood that rebellion would succeed in the Palestinian case, we can safely assume that rebellion is a high-risk option. History suggests that rebellion is likely to fail.

Thus far, the evidence presented suggests that Palestinians did see rebellion as an option to escape losses, and that rebellion is historically risky due to the low likelihood of success. The evidence indicates that the chance for success may be low, based on historical precedent, but it does not suggest that rebellion will necessarily fail in this case. Perhaps the best evidence to suggest respondents opted for an obviously risky option comes from their own experiences. Most respondents (82.1%) in this study suggest that in Palestine, the armed struggle has not achieved the goals it set out to—hence the persistence of perceived losses in the face of ongoing peace processes. Most respondents indicate that the peace accords fell well short of their goals, meaning that armed struggle did not achieve the ultimate goal of national lib-

eration. Thus, in these cases we could say the armed struggle, to this point, has failed. Yet, an overwhelming majority of respondents (92.3%) state they will continue to support violent action in the future.

What does this evidence suggest in relation to prospect theory? Recalling the discussion on prospect theory, groups continue in risky enterprises when facing losses even when those risks have failed in the past. The persistence of losses (even worsening conditions because of the rebellious action) is not likely to be perceived in terms of failed rebellious activity. Instead, past and future decisions to rebel are segregated from other outcomes, meaning that the decision to support armed struggle is assessed in relation to the goals of the group (i.e., national liberation) not necessarily in relation to past failure or worsening social conditions due to rebellion.

In sum, risky actions in the past (rebellion) failed to achieve the goals set out by the Palestinian groups. The peace process begun in Madrid and continued in Oslo signaled the possibility for success stemming from the risky option—suggesting that a frame change towards gains was possible. Subsequent stalls in the peace process quickly undermined the possibility that a gains frame could spread throughout the Palestinian community. Palestinians may have viewed Israeli efforts as a move to guarantee Israeli security at the expense of Palestinian independence. As such, perceptions of gains never spread and individual perceptions of persistent losses grew stronger. By the time the interviews were conducted (summer 1999), anger and resentment had grown strong, and people began to display romantic images of the Intifada, and call for a return to the armed struggle. For example,

“It [the Intifada] was a great thing. People took their lives into their own hands to fight the occupation” (23).

In sum, the perceived losses of Palestinians were not recovered during the peace process, and a gains frame never developed. The absence of a gains frame is supported by public opinion polls conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (February 1999) where only 6.3% of Palestinians believed Oslo would result in peace and only 10.5% believed Oslo would bring about an independent Palestine. Therefore, the Palestinian choice continues to resemble a choice defined by opposing losses. The first option represents a certain loss—no change would occur through the existing peace process. The second option entails a probable loss—resurgent rebellion resulting in a reverse of progress, but also provides the possibility that Israel would give greater concessions for Palestinian independence in their self-defined homeland. As prospect theory predicts, when facing a choice between two perceived losses, individuals are more likely to accept the risky option that holds the potential to escape losses altogether. This assessment is supported in part by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center polls (December 2000) where 69% of Palestinians believe the new Intifada has increased Israel's willingness to accept Palestinian demands.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study demonstrates how prospect theory can serve as an alternative model of decision-making to explain how the individual, social conditions, and social movement organizations relate to collective mobilization. Prospect theory offers an advantage over Framing Theory and Resource Mobilization as separate explanations, by unifying them through the assumption of individuals as motivated to avoid or recover losses more than to maximize benefits.

The Palestinian case study serves as an illustrative case demonstrating how perceived losses would lead people to accept

greater amounts of risk and persist in risky ventures to avoid or recover perceived losses. This study was conducted primarily at the individual level. It defined reference points based on the history of the Palestinian National Movement ("The Return" and/or the Two-State Solution) and revealed how the different points of reference manifest themselves among those interviewed. The reference points then served as a standard of assessment for past conditions (prior to Oslo) and more recent conditions (post-Oslo, pre-al-Aqsa Intifada). The assessment demonstrates a consistent perception of loss among those interviewed, suggesting a strong predisposition for risky behavior. The interviewees suggest that the perception of existing losses was certain, and that rebellious action offered a chance to escape losses altogether. While social conditions may worsen because of rebellion, prospect theory tells us that the decision to engage in rebellion will not be viewed in these terms. Instead, the decision will be viewed in relation to the outcome of national liberation, while worsening conditions are likely to be integrated into existing perceptions of losses within the social condition.

The study, while useful, is limited in many regards. First, the Palestinian case is presented to illustrate how rebellious choices are perceived. It does not serve as a test of hypotheses, or rival hypotheses. Therefore, further studies are needed to examine critically prospect theory at the individual level within rebellious situations. Second, the study is designed only to apply prospect theory at the individual level; therefore, it does not capture elements of the broader theory. Work still needs to be done to demonstrate that groups actively engage in framing processes to mobilize people that may or may not be predisposed to accept risk. Such a study will also need to test rival hypotheses as well—especially those related to Resource Mobilization whereby the organization serves as a patron to induce people to join and engage in collective action. Other studies that may be of use in-

clude Northern Ireland where the peace process has had relative success, or the Tamil case where a peace process has recently begun. Here a study could focus on how well a gains frame may have diffused into society to prevent a continuation of rebellious activity. It may be that people still perceive losses, but organizations previously engaged in rebellious action are now serving as barriers to further rebellious activity, a critical test of the claims made here.

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